

The Duke medal delivery delays irk waiting fans

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions from Tribune readers.

Q—After waiting patiently for nearly four months, I still haven't received three medals honoring John Wayne that I ordered from the U.S. Mint. How much longer will it be?—A.W., Decatur.

A—It's impossible to say. Mint bosses insist that orders for coin sets and medals are being filled as fast as possible, but many collectors report long delivery delays.

The shoddy service is due to the huge number of orders received for the John Wayne medals, packaging mixups, and other problems. If you want to complain, write Mint Director Mrs. Stella Hackel Sims, Bureau of the Mint, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C. 20220.

Q—A few days ago I tried to pay my electric bill with a stack of pennies and nickels I had saved. The cashier made a fuss, saying the company didn't have to take them. Was she right?—D.T., Chicago.

A—Yes. Under a little-known federal law, cents and nickels are "legal tender" for any amount not exceeding 25 cents in any one payment. In other words, the woman didn't have to take more than 25 cents worth of your coins.

Q—I've seen references in coin advertisements to "minor coins." What are they?—S.B., Arlington Heights.

A—Technically the term refers to coins made with copper, nickel, or other cheap metals. Although the U.S. Mint no longer uses silver or gold in coins, most experts still refer to just cents and nickels as "minor."

Q—I've been told that a few 1979 proof sets are rare because of a mistake made in the "S" mint mark on some of the coins. Is this true and what should I look for?—R.D., Elmwood Park.

A—Late last year, government engravers redesigned the "S" mint mark used on all proof coins. The old "S" resembled a blob; the new mark is a clean, distinct "S."

Experts believe that about 500,000 1979 proof sets (15 per cent of those made) contain six coins